

Hampton-Pinckney opens its doors

Posted Saturday, April 24, 2004 - 10:33 pm

By Cheryl Allen
STAFF WRITER
callen@greenvillenews.com

Some people simply read about history.

Others actually try to envision it. Take Betti and George Bell, for instance. One of their favorite pastimes is sitting in their study and pondering what life must have been like in their house generations ago.

"We can be sitting in here in the evening ... and we will sit and think about what was actually discussed in this house - the Titanic, even the Hunley, for instance, and how people must have felt about different historical events."

It's easy to see why. The Bells live in a two-story, Greek Revival style home on Hampton Avenue that is believed to have been built no later than 1860.

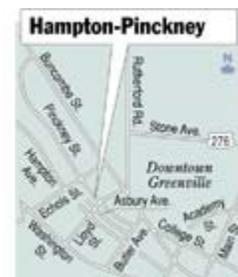
The house is one of several restored homes in the Hampton-Pinckney Historic District near downtown Greenville and is among six that will be featured in a homes tour today.

The Bells said they moved to the neighborhood 11 years ago.

"We knew we wanted an older home. We were really looking for the house that had character already sort of built into it ... and a real neighborhood with sidewalks, mature trees ... and we have certainly found that here in the Hampton-Pinckney area."

Drive through the neighborhood and you'll find just that — friendly walkways leading to restored homes in Craftsman bungalow, Victorian, Prairie and Dutch Colonial styles.

Some have imposing white columns. Others are trimmed in white gingerbread. Still others have wrap-around porches furnished with rocking chairs, swinging benches and wicker



Hampton-Pinckney resident Sara Dellinger, with her 6-month-old daughter, Siobhan, walks her dogs Madeline and Pip.

sofas — made especially for daydreaming and old-fashioned tea parties.

American flags fly from many of the porches, keeping watch over lush, neatly-trimmed lawns and beds of red, pink and white azaleas.

Dogwoods and mature oaks line the streets. And while you will hear the inescapable sounds of city traffic and sirens, it's often quiet enough to hear songbirds and rustling leaves on a perfect spring day.

"I like the pedestrian feel of the neighborhood," says resident Sara Dellinger, who enjoys taking a daily stroll with her 6-month-old daughter, Siobhan, and their corgis, Pip and Madeline. "I think most people are really committed to being good neighbors. Everyone looks out for one another."

The neighborhood association meets a few times a year and organizes celebrations for the Fourth of July, Halloween and Christmas. "There's a lot of planning in the neighborhood for the children," Bell said.

Rich history

In 1815, Greenville philanthropist and businessman Vardry McBee, bought more than 11,000 acres of land that included the present-day historic district. The first house was probably built sometime during the 1840s, says Alex Whitley of the Historic Greenville Foundation. Members of the McBee family gradually built other homes in the area over the course of the 19th century.

"You can definitely see what Greenville's earliest residential areas were like," Whitley said. "This area is connected to Vardry McBee, who was the father of Greenville, and that makes it special, I think."

The Hampton Avenue/Pinckney Street area was a prominent residential area and home to mayors and businessmen. But times changed by the 1960s and 1970s, when the area started to deteriorate and families began to move away. Some of the homes were boarded up or became rental properties.

Then in 1977, a neighborhood association was formed, says Wade Cleveland, the association's current president. "And it was formed for the purpose of saving the neighborhood from highway projects and ill-conceived urban renewal projects."

Cleveland says he shudders at the thought of what could have happened. He said historic homes on nearby Washington Street, for instance, were lost due to commercial construction.

—Details—

* **STREETS:** Hampton Avenue, Pinckney Street, Butler Avenue, Asbury Avenue and Lloyd Street, Hudson Street

* **PRICE RANGE:** \$150,000-\$500,000

* **YEARS BUILT:** Most of the homes were built between 1840-1920

* **SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 1,700-4,000 and up

* **SCHOOLS:** [Stone Academy](#), [League Academy](#) and [Greenville High Academy](#)

* **PARKS AND RECREATION:** The Peace Center for the Performing Arts, Hughes Main Library, Greenville Little Theatre, Greenville County Museum of Art, downtown shops and restaurants; West Washington Park, Pinckney-Fludd Park, Linky Stone Park

"We are fortunate. ... So by forming the neighborhood association, they intervened just in time," Cleveland said. Today, many of the homes on Hampton Avenue and Pinckney Street are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and have been restored or are being restored.

Ike Johnson, a member of Mattoon Presbyterian Church on Hampton Avenue, said he hopes his church will play a positive role during this period of transformation. "There seems to be a revitalization of the downtown area. Residents are coming to the city of Greenville. Although we haven't seen a tremendous increase in our membership, doors are open for new members at any time."

Revitalization of the area has attracted a number of young families and newcomers in recent years.

Amy and Jamey King are among those young couples with children. They moved to the neighborhood 12 years ago from Rock Hill because of a job transfer. For residents like the Kings, it's the best of both worlds — a peaceful atmosphere near an eventful downtown.

"My kids love to go downtown to shop and eat," says King, a 39-year-old mother of two. "I have walked to the Peace Center and we do walk to the Little Theatre and to the library."